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FIG. 1. A STRENGTHENED, TATAR-LIKE, COMPOUND BOW OF THE ALASKAN ESKIMOS

## INDIAN BOWS AND QUIVERS

BY ERNEST INGERSOLL

*Illustrated from examples in the National Museum.*

THE bow was as wide-spread as a weapon of the chase and war, in primitive days, as the distribution of men. It was the most universal, because the most effective, tool by which man could obtain his food, defend himself against enemies and gain power. Its invention must have marked a step forward in primitive society only to be compared with that when gunpowder was introduced.

Where was the momentous step taken? No one knows; but we may surmise that it must have been in some region where a strong elastic wood grew—perhaps the yew itself, since that is a native of those central highlands of Asia, whence the rest of the globe is supposed to have been colonized.

Its development would, of course, vary with divergent circumstances. In some parts of the world, as the South Sea Islands, it has never become a prominent implement; and in Africa, at any rate within recent times, the javelin, long knife and club, have mainly superseded the bow, which seems to retain its foremost place only among the degraded desert-dwelling Bushmen and Hottentots of the southern plains, where game is small.

It is probable, indeed, that a thorough study of the subject would show that the bow never held the important place in the

artillery of such primitive and savage people as inhabited a forested land that it had among dwellers in an open country. What we know of the history of the bow, both in the Old World and in the New, confirms this reasonable proposition.

Nowhere in the world have the bow and arrow reached a higher degree of development than in the western hemisphere, where skill in making them, and accuracy in their use, would have made many of our Indians as distinguished in archery-annals as were Robin Hood and his merry knights of the cloth-yard shaft, had there been a chronicler for the deeds of the aboriginal American bowmen. To bring down a heron on the wing, with a single arrow, was regarded as a feat of the first rank by even the best of the old English archers, but many a western redskin did

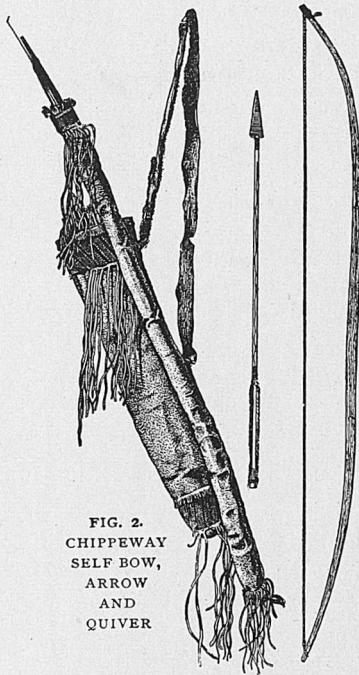


FIG. 2.  
CHIPPEWAY  
SELF BOW,  
ARROW  
AND  
QUIVER

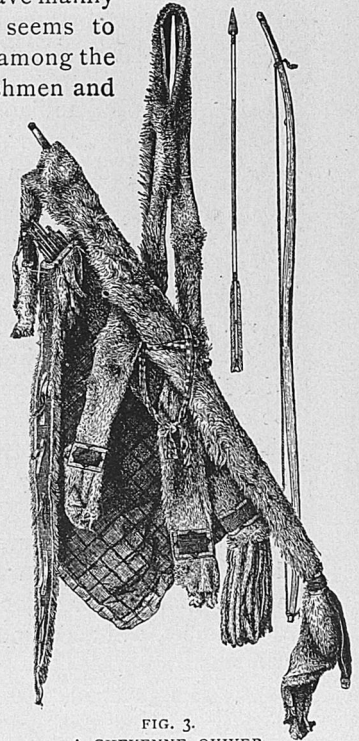


FIG. 3.  
A CHEYENNE QUIVER

that with far smaller birds, as a matter of course; and it is related of the Darien boys that by shooting upward they could cause the falling arrow to pin even a sparrow feeding on the ground. The Apaches, it has been said, would stick an arrow into the ground and then discharge another toward the sky with such nicety of calculation that it would split the first when it fell. The customary method of killing turtles on the Amazon is by an arrow sent in a lofty curve so as to descend squarely upon and pierce the shell, from which, otherwise, the missile would glance harmlessly. We do not know much about the bows and arrows of the South and Central Americans, but from the plains of northern Mexico northward, we find successively an increasing degree of excellence and complication in this weapon

beyond anything known elsewhere in the world. An examination of the accompanying illustrations, from specimens preserved in the National Museum, will make this apparent.

The eastern-coast Indians used the bow, but seem never to have got beyond the simplest single-stick form, and a moderate degree of skill in its use. They abandoned it as a serious weapon the moment they could obtain fire-arms from the Europeans; and it was the prompt adoption of this new weapon which gave the Iroquois tribes their great supremacy in the beginning of the last century. The Iroquois bows were much larger than those of the western Indians. The prairie-tribes went farther; and the Chippeways of the Great Lakes region were strong bowmen, and have kept the weapon, as appears from the recent example with its quiver, shown in figure 2. These Indians had such excellent woods as hickory, oak, ash, hornbeam, sycamore, dogwood and many other hard species, and all their bows were "selfs," that is, made



FIG. 4.  
DAKOTA

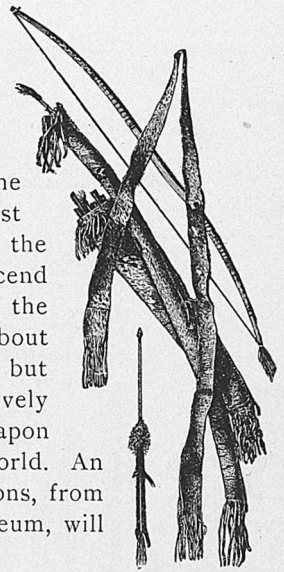


FIG. 5. SIOUX

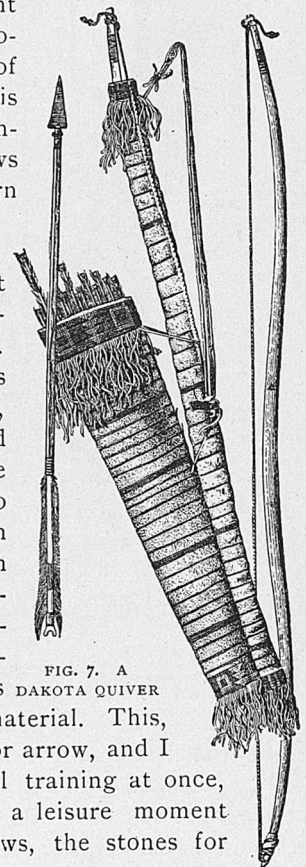


FIG. 7. A  
DAKOTA QUIVER

of a single straight piece of wood, but they were likely to be carelessly shaped and little if at all ornamented, though their fur quivers were often elaborately adorned, as is shown in figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10. "In every Indian wigwam," remarks Prof. Otis T. Mason, "were kept bowstaves on hand in different stages of readiness for work. Indeed, it has often been averred that an Indian was always on the lookout for a good piece of wood or other raw material. This, thought he, will make me a good snow-shoe-frame or bow or arrow, and I will cut it down. These treasures were put into careful training at once, bent, straightened, steamed, scraped, shaped, whenever a leisure moment arrived. . . . The wood for bows, the scions for arrows, the stones for

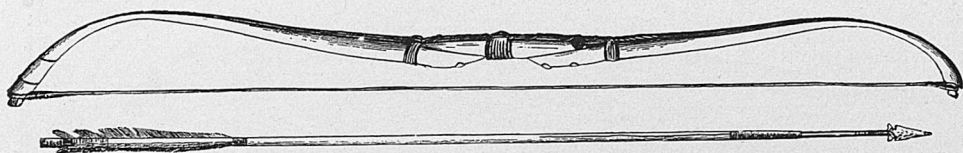


FIG. 8. A M'CLOUD RIVER (CALIFORNIA) COMPOUND BOW

the heads, and even the plumage for feathering, were articles of commerce."

All of the bows east of the Rocky Mountains (except among the Sioux) were made simply of a single piece, since suitable wood was obtainable by search or barter. The same was true of the Indians of northern California and Oregon, where yew was abundant, and their chief peculiarity lay in their thin broad shape, and the fact that, in accordance with the artistic taste of that region, the bow was polished, sometimes carved, but more often curiously painted (see figs. 11 and 12), and always thoroughly cared for. The same elaborateness was extended to the quivers, as appears in figures 13 and 14.

There were large areas of our west, however, where bow-wood was rare or altogether absent. The methods by which the deficiency was supplied are paralleled nowhere else in the world, and form one of the best illustrations of savage ingenuity. Bows were compounded of three or more pieces of wood, often very poor in quality, or were made of horn, whalebone and other materials.

FIG. 9. APACHE

Fine examples of this composite type are found among the Sioux, or were, for they are rare enough now. They have been pronounced the most graceful among existing savages anywhere, recalling the outlines of the conventional Cupid's bow, whose symmetrical double curves were modeled by classic artists after the bows they saw brought back to Greece and Rome as trophies captured from the hostile nomads of Asia and the Scythian steppes. These wild tribesmen prepared for their weapons the horns of cattle and gazelles, retaining, to some extent, their natural curvature; and, as do the Sioux (fig. 12), join them together in the middle by a third piece. It is natural that this center-piece should be termed the *grip*; but, knowing their origin, no less natural is it that the ends of a bow should be termed its *horns*. The joints are always concealed by sinew or rawhide bandages, so that the bow appears to be only a single stick.

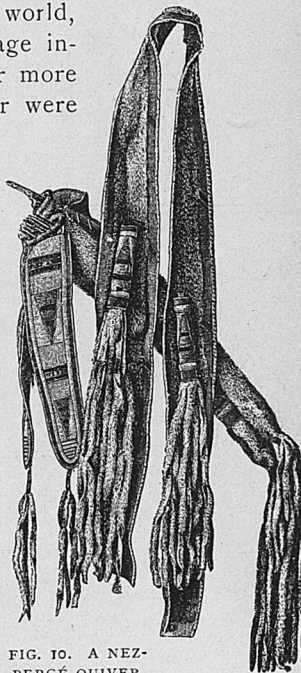


FIG. 10. A NEZ-PERCÉ QUIVER

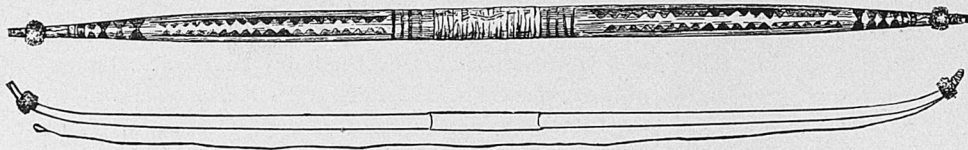


FIG. 11. A FLAT, PAINTED, YEW-BOW OF THE HUPAS: CALIFORNIA



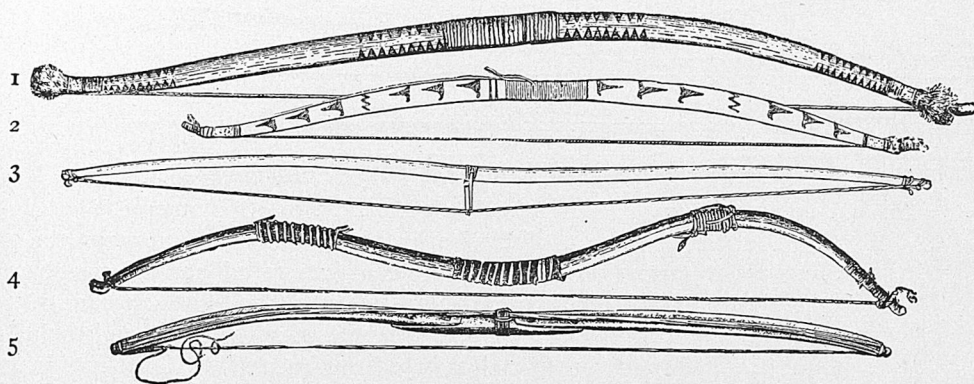


FIG. 12. BOWS STRENGTHENED WITH SINEW-BACKING

1. Yew; northern California; 2. Yew; McCloud River Valley, California (compare fig. 11); 3. Willow: Kutchin Indians of Alaska; 4. Compound bow made of cows' horns: Gros Ventres Indians, Montana.

In the Great Basin, or dry, depressed area between the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada, only small soft woods grow, unfit for good bow-making. Hence the bows of all that region, from northern Mexico to the head-waters of the Mackenzie, are short, thick and narrow; and in order to give them the requisite strength they are ordinarily reinforced by flat bands of shredded sinew, glued along the back or seized about the stock at short intervals. This adds not only strength but elasticity; and when, as in many cases, the bows were made of more than one piece, such strengthening was essential. In some

places nothing better than small shrubs of willow and birch were available; yet the bowyers knew how, with care and surprising patience, though with few tools, to make serviceable weapons out of these unpromising materials.

The most extraordinary strengthening of bows after this plan is that of the Eskimos, the details differing with each tribe. Figures 1 and 15 show some of these; and figure 18 exhibits the intricate way in which cords of twisted sinew, instead of glued bands, were often made to serve the purpose. These were secured about the "horns" and then braided or laced down the outer side, with long strands bound into cables and confined by frequent half-hitches, until they bore almost the whole strain of the work required of the instrument. The necessity for such assistance as this is plain when we remember that in the treeless arctic coasts and tundras many a hunter can procure

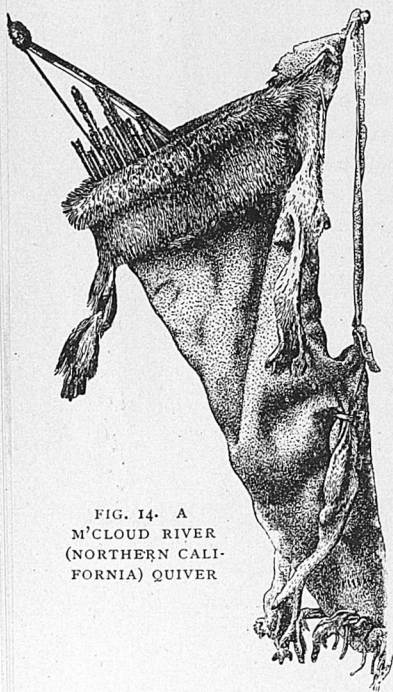


FIG. 14. A  
M'CLOUD RIVER  
(NORTHERN CALI-  
FORNIA) QUIVER

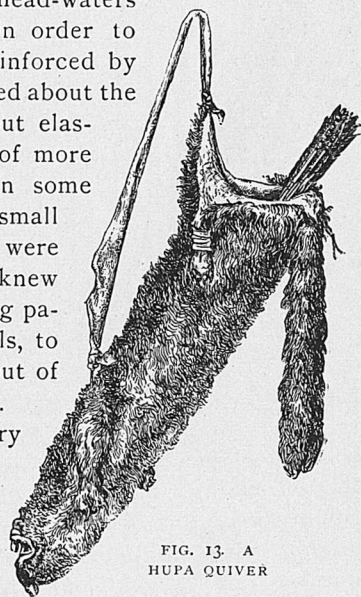


FIG. 13. A  
HUPA QUIVER

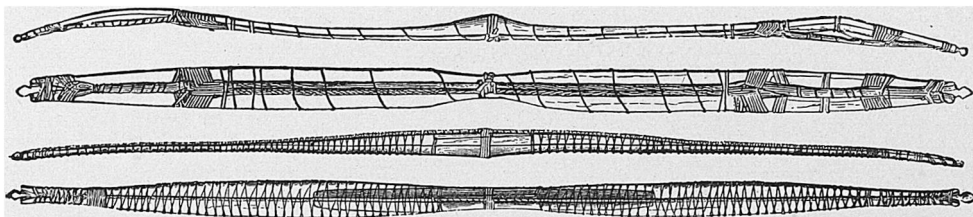


FIG. 15. TWO ESKIMO SINEW-CORDED BOWS: BACK AND EDGE VIEWS

nothing better for bow-material than strips of bone or cariboo-antler.

The quivers of the northern American Indians are so accurately depicted in the engravings that little description of them is called for. Among most Indians they

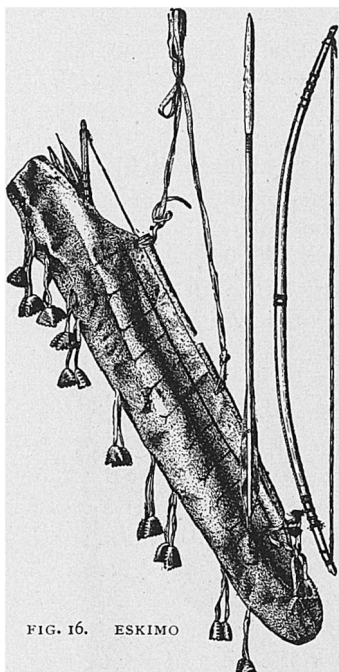


FIG. 16. ESKIMO

were made of the finest attainable furs, were as individual, and as highly embellished with trophies of prowess and needle-work tokens of affection, as were the shields of the knights of chivalry. The practical purpose they served was less as a means of carrying the bow and arrows, than as an arrangement for keeping them *dry*—an essential requisite to efficiency, since the wood must not be allowed to warp, nor the string, of sinew or of braided fibre, to become limp, nor the backing to soften and stretch. Nearly every fine quiver, possessed, also, a pocket devoted to the owner's fire-making materials, which he could not afford either to lose or get wet.

These implements belonged to every man, as a matter of course. Every Indian boy knew how to make a bow and had trained himself in its service from childhood. But as some were naturally more enthusiastic and skillful marksmen than others, so certain men had the knack or

knowledge of selecting better materials, and the patience and skill needed for making a superior article. Such artist-artisans of the savage community were always sought for advice, and a bow shaped by them was highly prized whenever it could be obtained. Hence when they became old, and no longer fit or eager for the chase or the fray, they

became howyers, sitting in dignified and well-earned ease before the door of their lodges, proud to make good weapons for the band whose fortunes were henceforth to be defended by younger arms.

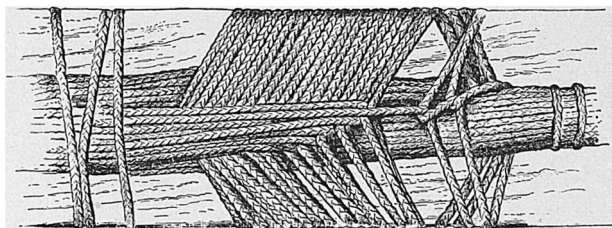
FIG. 17.  
EASTERN  
ESKIMO

FIG 18 AN ALASKAN SINEW-CORDING